


TO: Larry D. Voyles, Director

FROM: Jim deVos, Assistant Director 
Wildlife Management Division

PRESENTER: Amber Munig, Big Game Program Supervisor

TITLE: Consideration of Proposed Commission Orders 3, 4, and 26 for 2017 Hunting Season and Amendment to Commission Order 8 for the 2017 Spring Season.

DESCRIPTION: The Commission will consider and may approve Commission Orders 3 (pronghorn antelope), 4 (elk), and 26 (population management) establishing seasons and season dates, bag and possession limits, permit numbers or authorized limits, and open areas for the respective 2017 fall hunting season, and amending Commission Order 8 (bison) for the 2017 spring hunting season.

DATE: November 15, 2016

Summary:

Hunt structures and recommendations were formulated based on the two-year hunt guideline package approved in September 2015. The following hunt recommendations for fall 2016 pronghorn antelope, elk, and population management seasons are based on the guidance provided by that document. Regions 1, 2, 3, and 6 held public meetings after analyzing current year survey data and prior to meeting with the Terrestrial Wildlife Branch to discuss permit recommendations. These meetings were held from October 19–27, 2016. Attendance was low at these meetings. At each of these meetings, Regional staff shared recommended management direction regarding harvest with those in attendance.

Each Region will hold an open house between November 23 and November 30, 2016 at which the public can ask specific questions about hunt recommendations for pronghorn, elk, or population management seasons from knowledgeable staff. The hunt recommendations will be posted on the Department website by November 21, 2016.

In accordance with Hunt Guidelines, the Department will continue to allocate a proportion of the permits for pronghorn and elk within Units 4A, 5A, and 5B to Hopi tribal members based on the estimated populations of pronghorn and elk that occupy those lands. In exchange, the Hopi tribe will grant access to Hopi Trust Lands for permit draw hunters within the open hunt area. Likewise, Hopi tribal members that draw from their allotted permits will have access to the entire open area in the hunt area.

Specific information about pronghorn, elk, and population management seasons follow.

Commission Order 3 – Pronghorn Antelope

Attached to this memo are details of the recommended permit numbers by unit.

The statewide buck to doe ratio is above guidelines at 34:100, whereas fawn to doe ratio is below the guidelines at 24:100. In Region 3, public access is an ongoing concern and influences permit recommendations; however, there are a number of ranches that do allow public access facilitating pronghorn hunting. Big Boquillas Ranch in Unit 10 continues to charge a fee to enter the Ranch. About 60% of the hunters with pronghorn permits are paying the fee to hunt on the Big Boquillas Ranch.

General season permits are recommended to decrease by 3 from last year for a total of 471 permits. Permit recommendations are 276 for archery-only pronghorn (an increase of 5) and 78 for muzzleloader pronghorn (an increase of 11). A second muzzleloader hunt is recommended in Unit 8 with 15 permits, and a new archery-only hunt is recommended in Units 35A and 35B with 2 permits.

It is recommended that Hopi tribal members are allocated 13 general permits, 6 archery-only permits, and no muzzleloader permits in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B. The Raymond Wildlife Area will be open to all pronghorn hunters in this unit.

The hunts for pronghorn on Fort Huachuca in Unit 35A are recommended to remain closed.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 3 – PRONGHORN ANTELOPE AS PROPOSED.**

Commission Order 4 – Elk

Attached to this memo are details of the recommended permit numbers by unit.

The statewide bull to cow ratio is within guidelines at 32:100; the calf to cow ratio remains within guidelines at 35:100. As with pronghorn, a proportion of the permits in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B are recommended to be allocated to Hopi tribal members.

Elk harvest is recommended to allow limited population growth in some areas where growth is possible as identified in the Elk Management Plan; individual populations may be managed according to current habitat and environmental conditions.

This recommendation package continues to adjust bull to cow ratios to meet or move toward management guidelines. General season permits are recommended at 14,401 permits, a decrease of 16 permits from last year. An additional 31 general bull and 10 general antlerless permits are recommended for allocation to Hopi tribal members in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B. The Raymond Wildlife Area will be open to all elk hunters in this unit.

Youth-only general antlerless elk permit numbers are recommended at 1,310 permits, an increase of 98 from 2016. Eight permits are recommended to be allocated to Hopi tribal members in Unit 4A and 5A. The Commission directed the Department to allocate at least 5% of the total available elk permits as antlerless elk permits to youth-only seasons. The permit allocation in this package for youth-only antlerless elk permits represents 5.4% of elk permits.

Muzzleloader permits are recommended to increase by 15 permits to 1,168 (the change is a result of units rotating in and out of the muzzleloader season structure). No muzzleloader permits are recommended for Hopi tribal members.

Archery-only elk permits are recommended to decrease by 40 to 5,644. Hopi tribal members are recommended to receive 20 archery-only bull and 5 archery-only antlerless permits in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B.

CHAMP hunts are again recommended for Units 1, 6A, and 10 as these units have good access and sizeable elk populations. Permit levels are recommended to remain at 50. The CHAMP hunt in Unit 10 will continue to overlap the muzzleloader bull hunt in that unit; however, the permits during the muzzleloader hunt are recommended to decrease by half.

The Department's recommendation is generally consistent with the weapons allocation formula in hunt guidelines. Bull and antlerless elk harvests are allocated by sex and weapon type using 5-year averages of first-choice application demand and 5-year averages of hunt success by weapon type; limited opportunity, CHAMP, and youth-only hunts are excluded from this allocation determination. The targeted and recommended allocations for bull and antlerless elk permits are as follows:

Bull Elk:	<u>Target</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
General	56.5%	56.6%
Muzzleloader	6.0%	6.0%
Archery	37.5%	37.4%
 Antlerless Elk:	 <u>Target</u>	 <u>Recommended</u>
General	87.9%	83.6%
Muzzleloader	3.5%	4.8%
Archery	8.6%	11.6%

Projected harvest for both bull and antlerless seasons are expected to be within one percent of targeted allocation.

Limited opportunity general hunts are recommended to decrease by 168 general permits to 1,667 (the Unit 12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B limited opportunity recommendation is not included in this total; the recommendation is addressed below) and limited opportunity archery-only hunts are recommended for no change at 135 permits. Two muzzleloader limited opportunity hunts are recommended with 55 permits, an increase of 5 from last year. Limited opportunity archery hunts are recommended to remain the same at 135 permits. Hopi tribal members are

recommended to receive 68 antlerless general limited opportunity permits in Units 4A North, 5A, and 5B North.

Seasons on Camp Navajo in Unit 6B will continue to be offered as military, disabled veteran, wounded warrior, or other. Permits are recommended as 124 military (no change), 41 disabled veteran/ wounded warrior (no change), and 47 other (no change).

The nonpermit over-the-counter elk seasons are recommended to continue; Units 12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B are recommended for removal from the over-the-counter hunt structure.

There has been a small population of elk in Unit 12A and possibly Unit 12B for more than 15 years. More recently a small population has established in Unit 13B with the possibility of them being present or expanding in to Unit 13A. The Department estimates there are fewer than 50 elk in all 4 units combined. These units are managed for mule deer, and Units 12A and 12B are identified as Minimal Occurrence Elk Management Zones in the 2016-2018 hunt guidelines. The elk issues surfaced recently enough in Units 13A and 13B that a management structure has not yet been identified for those units in the hunt guidelines. However, the Department is managing the presence of elk in Units 13A and 13B consistent with the parameters of a Minimal Occurrence Elk Management Zone.

The Department has identified the elk populations that exist, or may exist, in Units 12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B as appropriate for elimination under the elk management guidelines. The presence of elk is undesirable and could have a negative habitat impact for the mule deer population. These elk are not essential to the long-term maintenance of elk populations in the state. To date, established hunt strategies have not been effective at eliminating these elk herds. Hunters, specifically nonresident hunters who are more proximate to these units, have indicated the cost of an elk tag for this low density, difficult to find elk population is prohibitive; residents find the distance to these units is prohibitive. Therefore, the Department is recommending a 750-permit limited opportunity draw hunt, with season dates of May 1 – October 12 and October 27 – December 31, 2017. The cost of the elk hunt permit-tag for this hunt only will be reduced to \$35. The following note will be included in the regulations and will pop-up during the online application process if the hunt number for this hunt is selected.

Units 12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B have an extremely low-density elk population, about 40-50 elk combined for all four units. These units are specifically managed for wildlife values other than elk, and an established elk population is not desirable. The intent of this hunt is to eliminate this elk population. The cost of the tag has been reduced to \$35 to help achieve this objective. The Department cautions you that due to extremely low elk densities, hunt success will be very low, likely less than 5%. If you apply for this hunt during the draw, you will almost certainly draw it, which will cause you to lose your bonus points. If you pick up one of these tags during the first come-first served process your bonus points will not be affected.

This hunt recommendation package was coordinated with land management agencies, local habitat partnership committees, and the Forage Resource Study Group in Region 2. Permits for bull and antlerless harvest were managed to meet management guidelines for bull to cow ratios and forage use as noted in the hunt guidelines and the Elk Management Plan.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 4 – ELK AS PROPOSED.**

Commission Order 26 – Population Management Seasons

Population management seasons are recommended for implementation in generally the same units, seasons, and permit levels as last year. "Designated deer," "designated elk," or "designated bison" is the legal wildlife in each of the population management seasons so that the Director may designate the desired legal animal for harvest if the permits are issued. Although the Department is recommending that the Commission authorize 1,725 deer (1,600 general and 125 archery only), 1,985 elk (1,205 general, 150 muzzleloader, 25 HAM, and 605 archery only), 770 javelina (360 general, 250 HAM, and 160 archery only), 170 bison (all general), and 122 bear (68 general, 26 HAM, and 28 archery only), these permits will not be issued unless approved by the Director following a determination from the population management hunt review and approval process. For archery turkey, the Department is recommending the Commission authorize 1,705 permits be available as "companion tags" to hunters who draw archery elk permits in the corresponding unit and season date.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 26 – POPULATION MANAGEMENT SEASONS AS PROPOSED.**

Commission Order 8 – Bison

Fall 2016 House Rock bison herd hunts in Unit 12A were approved by the Commission with a partial unit closure in the southeast portion of Unit 12A East in order to create a disturbance, pressure-free corridor down to House Rock Wildlife Area (HRWA). Through baiting and improved water distribution, the objective was to encourage bison to use HRWA where they may be undisturbed. In the past several years, very few bison had been harvested on the eastside. The Department believed this closure would have little impact on hunter harvest or opportunity.

The lightning-caused Fuller Fire started on June 29, 2016, east of AZ Highway 67 and north of the Point Imperial Road on the north rim of Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP). The fire burned northeast as far as the 8910 loop road on HRWA, burning a total of 14,541 acres, many of which were on the Kaibab National Forest. Summer rains on top of the Fuller Fire created a

lush green understory, which has attracted the bison causing a significant increase in bison presence in the closed eastside area.

In addition to changing bison distribution, the increase in highly nutritional forage rendered ineffective the Department's bison management actions from this summer and fall. The attempt to re-establish bison movement from the Kaibab Plateau to HRWA was the primary goal. The effects of the fire on bison distribution will likely last for several years. This change in bison distribution in Unit 12A East appears to be limiting harvest opportunities for permitted bison hunters in the open hunt areas of Units 12A East and 12A West.

In order to respond to changing bison distributions and decreased bison availability within the open areas of Unit 12A, the Department recommends amending Commission Order 8 (bison) to open most of the Unit 12A East closure to hunting. The only remaining closed portion would be in the very northeast portion of HRWA, bounded by forest roads 8910 and 3510 and the northeast boundary of HRWA. This remaining closed portion includes HRWA headquarters and two bison pastures. This will allow the Department to continue bison management actions at HRWA to establish and protect new bison at HRWA.

If the Commission approves the following recommendation, the Department will notify successful applicants for the affected hunts through formal correspondence.

The Department recommends the following:

- Amend the open area for the following Spring 2017 hunt numbers in Commission Order 8: 7026, 7027, 7028, 7029, 7030, 7031, and 7032.
- Amend the open areas to read: *12A (excluding a portion of east central 12A East, see note 4,) 12B, and 13A (House Rock Herd)*
- Amend Note 4 to read: *A portion of east central unit 12A East is closed to hunting. Beginning at the intersection of Forest Road 8910 and the Kaibab National Forest Boundary; south along FR 8910 to the intersection with FR 3510; easterly along FR 3510 to the Kaibab National Forest Boundary at South Canyon; Northerly then west along the Kaibab National Forest Boundary back to the intersection with FR 8910.*

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO AMEND COMMISSION ORDER 8 – BISON AS PRESENTED.**

JDV:AAM:am

Attachments:

Proposed Commission Orders